

# A PRAYER FOR OWEN MEANY: A RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

After completing this research assignment, you will be able to:

1. Work collaboratively to complete a large project.
2. Use MLA format correctly so that you can use it proficiently at the college or professional level.
3. Integrate primary and secondary sources to support your own ideas.
4. Analyze with confidence the intended effects of the literary devices in *A Prayer for Owen Meany*.
5. Understand and explain the relationship between the author's life, US history, and the novel.
6. Construct and integrate charts and diagrams into your writing.
7. Recognize and avoid plagiarism.
8. Demonstrate working knowledge of computer programs.
9. Be undaunted by a project of this magnitude in the future of your academic or professional career.
10. Address AP prompts fully and specifically.

## OVERVIEW OF THE PRODUCT

- Your completed project will include:
- A cover sheet (no plastic page covers please)
- A table of contents with names of writers
- Titled chapters that include the essays, charts, and diagrams enumerated below
- Any appendices you find necessary
- A works cited for each essay
- An integrity page
- Your own creative packaging and design

## Format of the project:

- Follow MLA format in all aspects
- Use 12 point type, standard fonts
- Standardize all formats so that all pages look identical
- Page numbers should be consecutive throughout the project

I understand that this AP assignment will be accepted NO LATER than my designated class time on \_\_\_\_\_. I received this assignment for review during the first week of school. I also understand that this assignment constitutes numerous grades. Overall grades will be given to the group for the project as a whole and individual essays will receive separate grades. The group will be responsible for the distribution of points based on the overall grade. A chart will be provided.

Your works cited include the properly written entry for **each** work you use in your essay. Use MLA format for all aspects of the paper.

All AP essays require primary source and at least one other source. All group essays require the primary source and at least three secondary sources.

As you do your research, make sure you are digesting and processing the information as opposed to just copying it verbatim without thinking. Evaluate the quality of the information; compare it with what you have read previously. Processing before you write a note is a good way to avoid plagiarism. By no means should all your notes be direct quotations from the text. Do make sure if you have summarized or paraphrased an idea from a secondary source that you record the page number in the source as you know you will be crediting the source for its idea. Internet sources may ONLY come from the library’s data base.

**WRITING THE RESEARCH PAPER**

- Your groups are responsible for the assignment and division of labor.
- Individual and group grades will be given. Individual grades will come from specific individual essays. Over all group grades will be given for the collaborative work. These grades will be distributed among the team by the team members.
- As you write the essays, blend your sources to show that you have synthesized the thinking you have done in your reading and research. Unless otherwise noted, your AP essays should refer to at least 1 secondary sources as well as the primary source.
- As needed, create appendices for material which would be interruptive within the text of the essay. If you include an appendix to amplify a given section of the text, note it (See Appendix A).
- Work hard to integrate quotations within the context of your own writing so that your own thinking provides the thrust of the essay. Make these integrations as seamless as possible.
- No quotes should be “long ones.” Use ellipses or paraphrase.

**INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING ESSAYS AND CHARTS:**

**Section I—Background Essays**

**1. US History**

- Read various sources on US history focusing on the 1960’s, starting with good general history books, then moving on to more specialized sources as needed. Do not spend too much time on the rest of US history. Focus on the 1960’, Vietnam, and the Regan presidency.

**2. US society**

- ☐ **As a group write** a 2-3 page essay that uses this AP prompt as its basis: Writers often highlight the values of a culture or a society by using characters who are alienated from that culture or society because of gender, race, class, or creed. Use a character in *A Prayer for Owen Meany* who plays a significant role and show how that character’s alienation reveals the surrounding society’s assumptions and moral values.

**As an individual** choose one of the following:

Some novels and plays seem to advocate changes in social or political attitudes or in traditions. Use *A Prayer for Owen Meany* and note briefly the particular attitudes or traditions that the author apparently wishes to modify. Then analyze the techniques the author uses to influence the reader's or audience's views. Avoid plot summary.

Or The conflict created when the will of an individual opposes the will of the majority is the recurring theme of many novels, plays and essays. From *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, select a fictional character who is in opposition to his or her society. In a critical essay, analyze the conflict and discuss the moral and ethical implications for both the individual and the society. Do not summarize the plot or action of the work you choose.

## Section 2—Interpretation Essay

### 3. Allusions and Images

- **As a group** from your active reading of the novel, **create a chart** of the motifs/images/allusions and themes these allusions and images create. For each theme, write an explanation about the how the images create theme. Then, under the theses, list some of the major allusions and images that create the motif and their page numbers. Provide the direct quotes with page numbers.
- **As a group writes** an essay on the following prompt: “The meaning of some literary works is often enhanced by sustained allusions to myths, the Bible or other works of literature. Use *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, explain the allusion that predominates in the work and analyze how it enhances the work’s meaning.” 2-3 pages
- **As an individual:** Write an AP essay analyzing how a symbol functions in the work and what it reveals about a character or theme of the work as a whole.

### 4. Characters

**As a group**, devise a chart or diagram that illustrates how the characters in *A Prayer for Owen Meany* are connected to each other. Create a key for the chart that enumerates: Each character’s major personality trait and function in the novel What each character symbolizes in the novel

**As a group**, write a 2-3 page essay on the following: In many novels and plays, minor characters contribute significantly to the total work. They often have particular functions, e.g., as instruments in the plot, foils to the main characters, commentators on the main action and theme, and the like. Write a well-organized essay showing how three minor characters function in *A Prayer for Owen Meany*.

**Individually** response to ONE the following AP questions. 2-3 pages

- Choose a character and write an essay in which you a) briefly describe the standards of the fictional society in which the character exists and b) show how the character is affected by and responds to those standards.
- In *A Prayer for Owen Meany* a character has a misconception of himself or his world, destroying or perpetuating this illusion contributes to a central theme of the work. Choose a major character to whom this statement applies and write an essay in which you consider the following: 1) What the character's illusion is and how it differs from reality as a represented in the work. 2) How the destruction or perpetuation of the illusion develops a theme of the work.

## 5. Psychology

- **Individually** write 2-3 page essay on the following: A recurring theme in literature is "the classic war between passion and responsibility." For instance, a personal cause, a love, a desire for revenge, a determination to redress a wrong, or some other emotion or drive may conflict with moral duty. Using *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, choose a character who confronts the demands of a private passion that conflicts with his or her responsibilities. In a well-written essay show clearly the nature of the conflict, its effects upon the character, and its significance to the work

## 6. Plot

**As a group, write** a response to ONE of the following AP questions:

- The British novelist Fay Weldon offers this observation about happy endings: "The writers, I do believe, who get the best and most lasting response from readers are the writers who offer a happy ending through moral development. By a happy ending, I do not mean mere fortunate events, a marriage or a last-minute rescue from death, but some kind of spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation, even with the self, even at death. "Using *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, identify the "spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation" evident in the ending and explain its significance in the work as a whole.
- Novels and plays often include scenes of weddings, funerals, and other social occasions. Such scenes may reveal the values of the characters and the society in which they live. Using *A Prayer for Owen Meany* write an essay in which you discuss the contribution the scene makes to the meaning of the work as whole

## 7. Theme

- **As a group** create a diagram or chart that illustrates the topics and themes in *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. Keep in mind that there can be multiple themes for a topic.
- **As individuals, write** an essay on **one** of the following:

In retrospect, the reader often discovers that the first chapter of a novel introduces some of the major themes of the work. Use *A Prayer for Owen Meany* to write an essay about the first chapter in which you explain how the chapter functions to set forth major themes.

OR

In his essay "Walking," Henry David Thoreau offers the following assessment of literature: "In literature it is only the wild that attracts us. Dullness is but another name for tameness. It is the uncivilized free and wild thinking in Hamlet and the Iliad, in all scriptures and mythologies, not learned in schools, that delights us."

Consider *A Prayer for Owen Meany* as a work that you may initially have thought was conventional and tame but that you now value for its "uncivilized free and wild thinking." Write an essay in which you explain what constitutes its "uncivilized free and wild thinking" and how that thinking is central to the value of the work as a whole.

Comments from previous students:

- 1. Plan out your project—assign items, check each others’ work, meet early.
- 2. Use the wiki or other web sites to discuss with your group.
- 3. Compiling final materials takes a huge amount of time.
- 4. Everything takes twice as long as you expect it to.
- 5. Have food for each meeting.

Mechanics:

- 1. Have a creative binder cover. Do NOT use plastic page covers. Use dividers between sections. Label EACH writing clearly. Number pages consecutively from beginning to end.
- 2. Make a table of contents with page numbers and names of individuals who did each section.
- 3. You need works cited pages for EACH writing or chart that is included.
- 4. Each group essay requires at least Three other sources besides the primary source.

Integrity page

Create a final page on which you state something like:

“Individually and as a group, we have honestly completed this entire project. We have not plagiarized. We have worked together and taught each other what we researched and wrote.”

Each of the group members needs to sign and date this statement. If you cannot sign this statement, please write an explanation and sign that.

Detach and turn in the statement below.

I understand that this AP assignment will be accepted no later than my designated class period on \_\_\_\_\_ I also understand that this assignment constitutes several grades.

Date:

Student\_\_\_\_\_

Parent\_\_\_\_\_